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Stop registration of new fishing vessels: Experts



KOCHI: A panel of experts has drafted a national-level action plan for the sustainable development of marine fisheries, with a call for stopping registration of new fishing vessels in Indian waters to solve overcapacity in the sector.

Aimed at implementing the Sustainable Development Goal-14 (SDG) of the [United Nations](#) in India, the experts from marine fisheries, forests, environment, ocean development, industry, fisher associations and coastal zone management who met in Kochi recommended licencing scheme to fishing gear and boat building yards too.

The action plan was formulated at a national workshop on SDG-14 organised by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), WWF-India and NITI Aayog.

Formation of marine parks, community reserves and no-take zones is one of the major recommendations in the action plan. It also includes proposal to declare ecologically sensitive marine hotspots as biodiversity heritage sites.

In addition, a demand for imposing the Minimum Legal Size ([MLS](#)) restrictions on all the coastal States and UTs uniformly to avoid juvenile fishing has been included in the action plan.

Presently, the MLS was notified only in [Kerala](#). It also includes an urgent call to finalise Ocean Regulation Management Act to bring uniformity in fishing in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with common rules and specifications. In order to regulate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, suggestion for implementing vessel monitoring and surveillance (VMS) system by all the coastal states has also been included in the action plan.

Another major component in the action plan is a proposal for restricting the fishing rights in the sea exclusively for the fishing community dwelling in the coastal villages and protecting them by creating employment opportunities and income generating avenues such as crab fattening, bivalve farming and ecotourism in mangrove belts for the successful execution of the conservation programme.

The action plan also contains a proposal to phase out harmful subsidies, which act as a driving force for overfishing and to utilise this fund to support the livelihoods of the fishing community.

The panelists also demanded for getting free prior informed consent of the fishing community prior to implement any development project in coastal belts. Formation of District-Level Committees (DLS) for monitoring CRZ violations and developing capacity building of the fishing community also has been mooted in the action plan. Need for recognizing the importance of women and their organisations is the other major proposal in the plan.

The action plan, which is route map for achieving the SDG-14 of the United Nations in Indian context, will be sent to all maritime States for taking further actions.

P K Biswal, Additional Secretary of Planning and [Convergence](#) Department of Odisha, Dr A Gopalakrishnan, Director of CMFRI and Dr Sejal Worah, Programme Director of WWF-India among others who spoke in the closing session of the workshop.